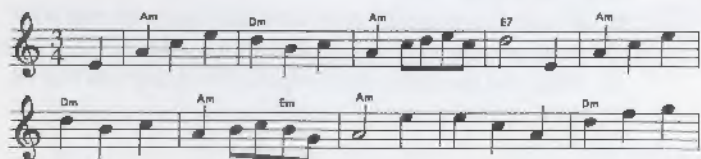




CARTER G. WOODSON FOUNDATION

A Study
Guide
for
TeachersCHAMINADE
STRING
QUARTET

The Chaminade String Quartet has given many concerts in the United States and abroad: as close to home as Manhattan's Alice Tully Hall and the Studio Museum in Harlem; as far away as the Moulin D'Ande in Normandy, France. Wherever they perform they touch and enrich peoples' lives with the wonders of chamber music.

The term "chamber music" dates back to the 16th century and comes from the Italian phrase *musica da camera* which literally means "music for a room". This music was given this name because it was created to be performed in very intimate settings such as the drawing rooms of private homes. Unlike orchestral music where one part of the music may be written for many instruments, with chamber music no instrument has the same part. It is as though the music is a play and each instrument is a separate and distinct character.

In general chamber music is for two to ten different instruments. Examples include a duet of violin and piano; a trio of piano, violin, and cello; and a quintet of flute, oboe, violin, viola, and double bass. The most popular kind of chamber music group is, however, the string quartet.

A string quartet is made up of two violins, one viola, and one cello, all of which are played with a bow. The violin is the smallest of these instruments and is held under the chin.

The viola, also held under the chin, is slightly larger. The cello—short for violoncello—is much larger and is held between the knees. Just as each of these instruments plays a different part of the music, each has a different sound: from very high to very deep. If you think of these instruments as singers, the first violin would be a soprano; the second violin, an alto; the viola, a tenor; and the cello, a bass.

For some two hundred years the string quartet has been a favorite medium for many composers. It is said that it is a perfect musical medium because these four instruments produce a unique unity of sound precisely because the instruments are very similar, and yet so different. Among the most famous string quartet composers are the Austrian Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809) who is considered the "Father of the String Quartet", Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) who was also Austrian, and the great German composer Ludwig von Beethoven (1770-1827).

Chaminade String Quartet

The Chaminade String Quartet's repertoire includes the works of these composers as well as those of Felix Mendelssohn (German; 1809-1847); George Walker (African-American; 1922); Bela Bartok (Hungarian; 1881-1945); and Dmitri Shostakovich (Russian; 1906-1975). The Chaminade String Quartet takes its name from the French composer Cécile Louise Stéphanie Chaminade (1857-1944).

Over the years the Chaminade String Quartet has been rewarded for their musical abilities with numerous awards and prizes, among them: the post of Quartet in Residence at The City College of New York and the rank of premiere scholarship quartet at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France in 1989 and 1990. In 1991 the group won the Cleveland Quartet Competition sponsored by the Eastman School of Music. Such honors are the fruit of many years of hard work. Since they were children the members of the quartet have put a lot of concentrated time and energy into their craft. And they have done so with great joy because as they see it, as musicians they are able to communicate feelings and events to many different people without saying a word. In fact, they see what they do as being very much like painting. Their "color palate" is made up of different volumes and tempos.

The words that indicate how the music is to be played come from the Italian language. Some examples are: piano (soft); forte (loud); lento (slow); moderato (moderate); allegro (quick); and presto (very quick). Thus, depending on the combination of volumes and tempos, the music is able to capture a range of feelings such as sadness, fear, loneliness, excitement, and joy. In this way the music creates pictures of human emotions and experiences that everyone can understand.



Acquaint your students with the instruments that make up a string quartet by reviewing with them the diagrams above.

Before The Performance

Explain to your students that the Chaminade String Quartet is a chamber music group that gives concerts in the United States and abroad. Explain that chamber music is a kind of music written for a small number of instruments and usually performed in small concert halls.

Explain to your students that the selections they will hear will not all have titles like most popular music, but that many of them have titles that are informative as opposed to descriptive. Use "BEETHOVEN OP. 59 #3 IN C MAJOR" as an example and explain that Beethoven is the composer and "op." stands for opus which literally means "work." Explain that the number following "op." indicates the creative period (early, middle, or late) in which the work was written. In this case, "op. 59" indicates that the work is from the middle period of Beethoven's career. Finally, explain that "#3" means that this was his third quartet written during this period, and "C Major" is the key in which the work was written.




After The Performance

After reviewing the selections on the program with your students, have them as a group, develop a one-paragraph description of each selection. Ask your students the following questions:

1. Which composition(s) did you like the most and why?
2. In what ways were the compositions alike and different?
3. What did the different compositions make you feel or think about?

New Words



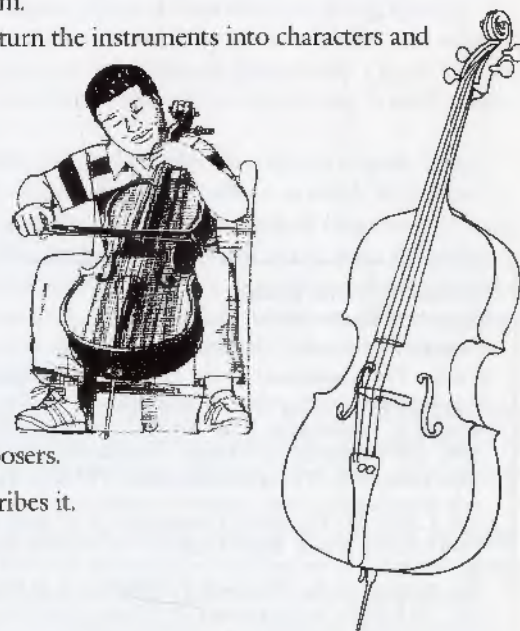
ALLEGRO	Quick. In Italian the word means "cheerful" or "lively".
ALTO	The lowest range of the female singing voice.
BASS	The lowest range of the male singing voice. Also, the largest instrument in the string family. Its full name is "bass viol" and is also called "bass fiddle" or "double bass".
COMPOSER	A person who writes music. The product is a composition.
CHAMBER MUSIC	Music composed generally for two to ten instruments and usually performed in a room or small concert hall.
STRING QUARTET	The most popular type of chamber music. It is composed of two violins, one viola, and one cello, all of which are played with a bow.
OPUS	A musical composition or a literary work.
ORCHESTRAL MUSIC	Music composed for and performed by an orchestra. An orchestra may have as many as a hundred instruments and is usually made up of all four instrument families: Brass, Percussion, String, and Woodwind.
PIANO	Soft. Also, the name of an instrument.
PRESTO	Very quick.
QUARTET	A group of four musicians or singers; also a composition for four instruments or voices.
REPERTOIRE	The standard collection of music, songs, plays, or dances a group performs.
SOPRANO	The highest range of the female singing voice.
STRINGS	One of the four instrument families. These instruments are played by drawing a bow over the strings (as with the violin, viola, and cello) or plucking the strings with one's fingers or a pick (as with the banjo, guitar, harp, and ukelele).
TEMPO	The speed at which music is played.
TENOR	The highest range of the male singing voice.
VOLUME	The degree of sound intensity.

Follow-up Activities

1. Have your students imagine that they are music critics for a local newspaper. After discussing with them the main elements of a review, have each student write a review of the Chaminade String Quartet concert.
2. Have each student do an illustration for one of the selections on the program.
3. Using one of the selections on the program, have your students as a group turn the instruments into characters and create a story the music might be telling.

Chaminade String Quartet Education Project Post Test

1. What is the Chaminade String Quartet and what does it do?
2. What is chamber music?
3. What instruments make up a string quartet?
4. List four parts of these instruments and tell how they are played?
5. Name "The Father of String Quartet" and three other string quartet composers.
6. Describe one composition you heard and give it a title you think best describes it.
7. In what ways were the compositions you heard alike or different?
8. What other art form(s) is music like and how?
9. Why is music called a universal language?
10. How has the Chaminade String Quartet concert affected your thoughts about chamber music or music in general?





New Books

The following books may be helpful resources:

A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (Houghton Mifflin, 1989)

The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy™ edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil (Houghton Mifflin, 1988)

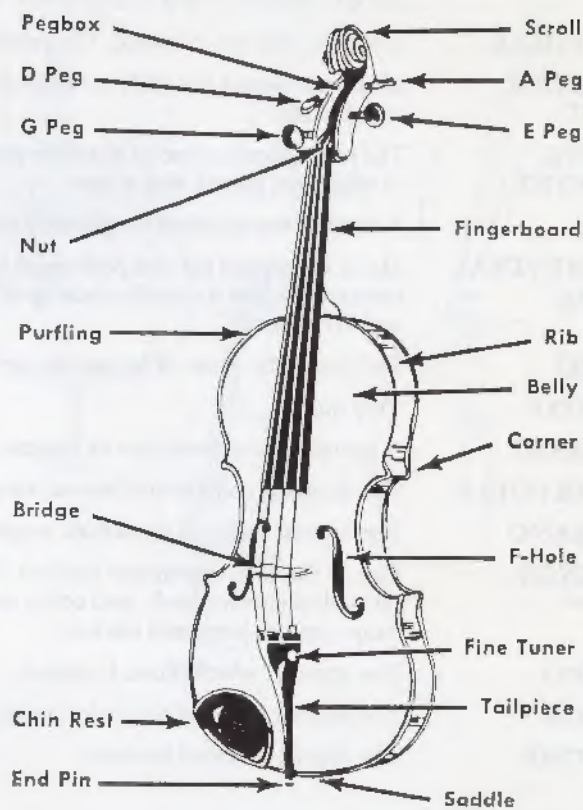
The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians edited by Sadie Stanley, 6th edition, 20 vols. (Macmillan, 1980)

The New Harvard Dictionary of Music by Don Michael Randel (Harvard University Press, 1986)

The Oxford Dictionary of Music by Michael Kennedy (Oxford Press, 1985)

The Music of Black Americans: A History by Eileen Southern, 2nd edition, (NY/Norton, 1983)

PARTS OF A VIOLIN



BOW

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The mission of the Woodson Foundation is to research, preserve, perpetuate and celebrate the creative expressions, the cultural heritage, and the historic achievements of African-Americans through performances, exhibits and educational activities.